

Ember Days

“The material in the Large Catechism originated as sermons by Martin Luther on the basic texts of Christian teaching. Already in the Middle Ages, some regional synods in Germany had called for regular preaching on the “catechism” (usually defined as the Ten Commandment, Apostles’ Creed, Lord’s Prayer and, sometimes, the Ave Maria). The Ember Days, four time of fasting spread throughout the church year {*The Wednesday, Friday and Saturday after 1st Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, Holy Cross Day(Sep 14), and St. Lucia’s Day(Dec 13)*}, were often designated for this purpose. Even before the Reformation, Wittenberg’s city church, St. Mary’s also seems to have followed this practice. Luther himself preached on various portions of the catechism as early as 1518” (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb, preface to Large Catechism, p.377)

“Thus, we have, in all, five parts covering the whole of Christian doctrine, which we should constantly teach and require young people to recite word for word. Do not assume that they will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone. 25 When these parts have been well learned, you may assign them also some Psalms and some hymns, (*Luther himself wrote six hymns based on the parts of the Catechism.*) based on these subjects, to supplement and confirm their knowledge. Thus, our youth will be led into the Scriptures, so they make progress daily.

26 However, it is not enough for them simply to learn and repeat these parts verbatim. The young people should also attend preaching, especially at the time designated for the Catechism, so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of every part. Then they will also be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, and thus the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit. 27 The reason we take such care to preach on the Catechism frequently is to impress it upon our youth, not in a lofty and learned manner but briefly and very simply, so that it may penetrate deeply into their minds and remain fixed in their memories. (Preface of 1529, Large Catechism, (Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia).

Collects

Ember Wednesday. —Lord, God, all-powerful, the solemnity of our redemption is near. May it bring us the helps that are useful for our present life and obtain for us the rewards of eternal happiness. This we ask of You through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **AMEN.**

Ember Friday.—Stir up, Thy power, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and come: that they who trust in Thy goodness may be the more speedily freed from all adversity: who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **AMEN.**

Ember Saturday.—Lord, our God, You see we are overwhelmed in our misery; let Your coming console us. This we ask of You, Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **AMEN.**

O Antiphons

Between December 17 and 23, the church begins to anticipate the coming of Christ’s Mass. In the daily Vespers service, the seasonal antiphons for the canticle the *Magnificat* is replaced with 7 different antiphons. These antiphons are all addressed to different names for our Lord and thus they all begin with the interjection, “O.” The hymn, “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” is based on these antiphons.

December 18.--O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on / Sinai:

Come with an outstretched arm and re- / deem us.(*Ex. 3:2, 10:1*)

Catechism Schedule

- Advent 2021 – Ten Commandments
- Lenten 2022– Apostles’ Creed
- Pentecost 2022 – Lord’s Prayer
- September 2022– Holy Baptism
- Advent 2022 – Confession/Office of the Keys
- Lenten 2023 – Lord’s Supper
- Pentecost 2023 – Daily Prayers
- September 2023 – Table of Duties
- Advent 2023 – Christian Questions with their Answers

The Order of Vespers, p. 224

- Hymn..... #25
- + “O Lord, open my lips... p.224
- + “Praise to you, O Christ, King who comes to save us”p.225
- Psalmody
- Psalm 24 (printed)
- Psalm 50 (printed)
- Psalm 85 (printed)
- Psalm 19 (printed)
- Reading
- St. Luke 3:1-6
- Common Responsory p.226
- “Teach me your way, O Lord...”
- Catechism Reading
- Sat – Ten Commandments (p.300-301)
- Office Hymn #329
- Sermon
- + Antiphon
- L. O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on / Sinai: Come with an outstretched arm and re- / deem us.
- + The Magnificat p.228-230 (*antiphon is repeated*)
- + The Prayers..... p.231
- Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy...”)
- Lord's Prayer
- L. “*The Lord be with you.*” (*left*)
- R. “*And with your spirit.*”
- Collect of the Day (back)
- Special Prayers, Collect for Grace
- + Benedicamus & Blessing p.222

Commentary on Genesis 2:9

By Dr. Martin Luther

Also the tree of life was in the midst of Paradise, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Moses describes Paradise in such a way that he makes of God a gardener who, after planting his garden with great care according to his design, chooses one or more trees which he tends and loves more than the rest. One of these was the tree of life, created that man, by eating of it, might be preserved in full bodily vigor, free from diseases and free from weariness.

Here again man is set apart from the brutes, not only in regard to place but also in regard to the advantage of a longer life and one which always remains in the same condition. The bodies of the remaining living things increase in size and are stronger in their youth, but in their old age they become feeble and die. The situation of man would have been different. He would have eaten; he would have drunk; and the conversion of food in his body would have taken place, but not in such a disgusting manner as now. Moreover, this tree of life would have preserved perpetual youth. Man would never have experienced the inconveniences of old age; his forehead would never have developed wrinkles; and his feet, his hands, and any other part of his body would not have become weaker or more inactive. Thanks to this fruit, man's powers for procreation and for all tasks would have remained unimpaired until finally he would have been translated from the physical life to the spiritual. Therefore the remaining trees would have supplied delightful and most excellent food, but this one would have been like a medicine by which his life and his powers were forever maintained at their utmost vigor.

Here again a question is proposed: How did a physical food or a fruit have the power to preserve a body in this way that in the course of time it did not become more inactive or sickly? But the answer is easy (Ps. 33:9): "He spoke, and it was done." For if God can make bread out of a stone, why couldn't He also preserve our powers by means of a fruit? Even after sin we see what great virtues are inherent even in the smallest herbs and seeds. (LW v. 1, p.92-93)

Ember Days in Advent, 2021



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THE EMBER DAYS

Among some Christians, it is the custom to observe these clusters of three days roughly at the beginnings of the four seasons. They fall on the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following:

The First Sunday in Lent
Pentecost Sunday
September 14th
December 13th (or, Third Sunday of Advent)

They are days of special prayer for those about to be ordained to the ministry, and some measure of fasting or abstinence, or partial fasting, or token fasting (such as not eating meat) is a customary part of their observance.

The entree shrimp tempura and its relatives, which we are accustomed to think of as traditional Japanese dishes, were invented by a Portuguese missionary as meatless dishes for special days like the Ember days, and the word "tempura" is derived from the word "Ember."

The history of the days has been a subject of much dispute. Their name is apparently derived from the Latin *quattuor tempora*, or "The Four Seasons." They appear to have originated in Rome and to have spread from there. (The Qumran community ("Dead Sea Scrolls") had a similar observance, but apparently this is only a coincidence.) Originally there were perhaps only three sets of them, with the Spring Ember Days simply part of the days of Lent.

The prophet Zechariah speaks (Zech. 8:19) of "the fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth," and many Western manuscripts omitted the reference to the fifth. Counting from March as the first month, this would have been understood to refer to fasts in June, September, and December, and may have influenced the Christian observance. Again, there were pagan rites of purification connected with the times of sowing seed (December) and harvest (June) and vintage (December) and the Christian fasts may have been chosen to counter-act these.

It has been said that the Ember Days were first observed in the time of Pope Callistus I (218-225), but the earliest definite reference to them that we have is in the sermons of Pope Leo the Great (440-461). Pope Gelasius I (492-496) decreed that ordinations should take place at the end of the first full week of Lent, and it may be that he both (a) added the Spring Ember Days to the calendar and (b) introduced the connection between the Ember Days and ordination. (We have evidence that ordinations also took place on the third Saturday in December.)

By James Kiefer

The sources: <http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/JEK/LITCAL/EmberDays.html>